

Transactions

SEPTEMBER 2004

TRANSPORTATION NEWS
FOR THE NINE-COUNTY
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



Facts & Figures

Bay Bridge East Span Costs Up Close



Giant hoists lift massive concrete deck sections into place.

A number of factors have helped push the cost of the Toll Bridge Seismic Retrofit Program to as high as \$8.3 billion — \$3.2 billion over Caltrans' 2001 estimate of \$5.1 billion. Among the culprits are spiraling steel and concrete prices as well as rising labor costs, along with higher construction insurance fees in the wake of 9/11.

Much of the funding gap can be attributed to the East Span project, which has nearly doubled in cost, going from a 2001 Caltrans estimate of \$2.6 billion to a summer 2004 price of \$5.1 billion.

The two-mile-long East Span was conceived as two bridges in one: a sleek causeway (referred to as a skyway) traversing the relatively shallow waters stretching west from Oakland, connecting to a showier (and, from an engineering standpoint, more complex) self-anchored suspension span across the deep waters adjacent to Yerba Buena Island. With its asymmetrical profile and graceful tower, the suspension span has been touted as a striking new landmark for the Bay Area.

The suspension segment garnered a lone construction bid of \$1.4 billion last spring — double the earlier estimate of \$700 million. Even so, this tower portion of the span accounts for just under 50 percent of the Toll Bridge Program cost overruns, with a full 40 percent of the shortfall attributable to the skyway and other portions of the East Span. The remaining funding gap is linked to two other ongoing retrofit projects: the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge (see the update on the back page) and the West Span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

— Brenda Kahn

Political Deadlock Threatens to Slow Bay Bridge East Span Project

DELAYS COULD PUSH COST
OVERRUNS EVEN HIGHER

A dramatic scene unfolded over the region's waters in late July as giant hoists delicately lifted the first 400-ton steel-reinforced concrete deck section into place on the new East Span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

Another drama — of the political kind — played out in August when Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger unveiled his proposal for dealing with the cost overruns associated with the state's Toll Bridge Seismic Retrofit Program, and especially the East Span project.

With construction on the causeway portion of the East Span well under way and the September 30 deadline fast approaching for the state to accept or reject the lone bid for building the final portion of the bridge — a self-anchored suspension span — the issue of how to cover the overruns has come to a head.

Governor Eyes Toll Revenues

The governor sparked a seismic event of his own at the August 16 press conference when he proposed a November 2004 measure asking Bay Area voters to divert money from the new Regional Measure 2 (RM 2) program to pay for the \$3.2 billion in cost overruns.

At the same time, the governor called for an independent audit team "to determine why this bridge took so long to plan and construct," as well as to "perform a complete fiscal analysis of the dollars spent" to date. The third leg of the governor's three-part solution involved legislation to transfer responsibility for overseeing the Toll Bridge Retrofit Program from Caltrans to MTC, while providing the regional agency "with all of the tools to fix the problem now and in the future."

Passed by Bay Area voters in March 2004, RM 2 raised tolls on the region's seven Caltrans bridges to \$3, effective July 1, 2004, with proceeds from the \$1 increase earmarked for public transit and highway projects to ease traffic congestion in the bridge corridors and to provide transbay commuters with more alternatives to driving.

"The argument that we (Bay Area residents) bear the cost by ourselves is ludicrous. It is not in keeping with tradition or history," state Senator Tom Torlakson (D – Antioch) told the *SF Chronicle* in the wake of the press conference.



Towering cranes outline the path of the new East Span's causeway section.

East Span Bid in Limbo

In the two weeks between the governor's announcement and the close of the state Legislature's 2003–2004 session, MTC and the Bay Area legislative delegation quickly mobilized to defend RM 2, countering the Governor's proposal with Assembly Bill 2366 (spearheaded by Assemblyman John Dutra, D-Fremont, along with incoming state Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland). The bill called for an interim solution, whereby the state would accept the construction bid for the suspension span while MTC, acting in its role as the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), would shift toll reserves and refinance existing toll bonds to cover immediate costs.



Suspension span foundations at Yerba Buena Island near completion.

The goal was to buy time to allow BATA and the state to take a measured look at the root causes of the overruns and to develop an equitable solution that draws on federal, state and local funding sources.

While the Perata/Dutra bill passed the Senate, it was never brought to a vote in the state Assembly. Schwarzenegger's ballot measure

also was rejected, leaving the bid for the suspension span in limbo.

"Every day we delay the East Span project translates to higher costs," said MTC Spokesman Randy Rentschler. That point is bolstered by a just-released report commissioned by MTC. Prepared by Bechtel Infrastructure Corporation, the report found that seeking new construction bids for the suspension span, or shifting to a more conventional cable-stayed design, could delay the opening of the new East Span by as much as four years (to the year 2015) and could lead to inflationary cost increases of as much as \$310 million.

Public Safety at Risk

Incalculable is the risk to public safety of prolonged travel on the seismically weak old East Span, which fractured in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake (with an epicenter 60 miles away).

"We can't afford to start from scratch," Rentschler said, noting that the skyway has been under construction since January 2002 and that crews have nearly completed the foundations on Yerba Buena Island for the self-anchored suspension span. Moreover, he said, redesigning a portion of the bridge at this late stage could call into question the earthquake readiness of the entire structure — an ironic twist given that seismic safety has been the primary goal of the project from the outset.

— Brenda Kahn

Calendar

Unless indicated otherwise, all meetings take place at:
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter
Lawrence D. Dahms Auditorium
101 Eighth Street, Oakland
(At the Lake Merritt BART station)

TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 28, 2004
9:30 am
Ozone Working Group

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2004
10 am
Bay Area Partnership Board*
Nile Hall, Preservation Park
668 13th Street, Oakland

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 7, 2004
10 am
Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee

FRIDAY
OCTOBER 8, 2004
9:30 am
Administration Committee*
9:45 am
Bay Area Toll Authority
Oversight Committee*
10 am
Programming and Allocations Committee*
10:15 am
Planning and Operations Committee*
10:30 am
Service Authority for Freeways and
Expressways Operations Committee*
10:45 am
Legislation Committee*

TUESDAY
OCTOBER 12, 2004
3:30 pm
Minority Citizens Advisory Committee

WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER 13, 2004
12:30 pm
Advisory Council

MONDAY
OCTOBER 18, 2004
1:30 pm
Partnership Technical Advisory Committee

THURSDAY
OCTOBER 21, 2004
9:30 am
Regional Pedestrian Committee
MetroCenter, Room 171
1 pm
Bicycle Working Group
MetroCenter, Room 171

FRIDAY
OCTOBER 22, 2004
10 am
Association of Bay Area Governments/
MTC Joint Policy Committee*
MetroCenter, Room 171
11 am
Regional Airport Planning Committee)

WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER 27, 2004
10 am
Service Authority for Freeways and
Expressways*
10:05 am
Bay Area Toll Authority*
10:15 am
Metropolitan Transportation Commission*

* Webcast on <www.mtc.ca.gov>.

Note: Dates, times and locations of MTC meetings may change. Please confirm by calling 510.464.7787. Agendas, updated meeting schedules and packets for MTC standing committees are posted on MTC's Web site: <www.mtc.ca.gov>.

Air Quality Community Meetings

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is hosting a series of evening community meetings in September and October on the Draft Ozone Control Measures and the Community Air Risk Evaluation (CARE) Program. For details, visit <www.baaqmd.gov>.

Feds Recognize Two Progressive MTC Programs



The national spotlight shone on two Bay Area projects in July when they were named tops in their categories by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration in the newly established Transportation Planning Excellence Awards Program. MTC's Low Income Flexible Transportation (LIFT) Program was honored for improving disadvantaged residents' access to employment, training, child care and other essential services. To date, the program has provided \$11 million to 32 innovative solutions, including shuttles that take children to and from after-school activities, and car loan programs for low-income individuals. The second award went to MTC for the creative and extensive public outreach for its Transportation 2030 planning effort. The biennial awards program is cosponsored by the American Planning Association.



Specially wrapped cars make a bold statement: Spare the Air — Ride BART!

New Weapon in Smog Battle: Free BART Rides

The offer of free BART rides on smoggy days apparently is having the intended effect. Thanks to the promotion, BART's daily ridership jumped by 16,000 on the smog season's first weekday "Spare the Air" day, and by 24,000 on the second, according to preliminary estimates. In June, MTC, BART and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District announced a groundbreaking deal to allow travelers to ride BART free during the morning

commute (before 9 a.m.) of the 2004 ozone season's first five Spare the Air days (that fall on weekdays). The three agencies are testing whether free rides are an effective inducement for Bay Area commuters to choose public transit over solo driving. MTC is covering the estimated \$2 million cost of the free-ride program with federal dollars. The Air District declares a Spare the Air day on hot, windless days when it expects unhealthy ozone levels. The ozone season runs from June to October.

Popular 511 Driving TimesSM Expands Coverage



MTC expanded its popular 511 Driving TimesSM service in late July to include on-demand, point-to-point travel times for five more key freeway corridors. Tapping data from FasTrakSM toll transponders and constantly updated information from Caltrans, the 511 Driving TimesSM feature tells motorists the current travel time between cities or major landmarks in the Bay Area, and reports any incidents along the route. The expanded 511 Driving TimesSM coverage is available free of charge on the phone at 511 or on the Web at <www.511.org>. 511 Driving TimesSM now covers 500 miles of freeway, including five toll bridges. Over the next year, this first-of-its-kind service will be expanded regionwide and will be available for all major Bay Area highways and bridges. — Brenda Kahn & John Goodwin

Commission Actions

July 2004

- Awarded nearly \$50 million in the first round of allocations under the new Regional Measure 2 Program (funded with the \$1 hike in state bridge tolls approved by voters in March) as follows:
 - \$30 million – S.F. Muni Metro Third Street Light Rail Line
 - \$5.7 million – S.F. Muni E-Embarcadero Streetcar Line (new waterfront service from the Caltrain Terminal to Fisherman's Wharf): purchase, shipping and rehabilitation of 11 historic streetcars to initiate service
 - \$11 million – BART Transbay Tube: seismic strengthening (for environmental phase)
 - \$3 million – Water Transit Authority: planning activities for fiscal year 2004–05
- (MTC Resolutions 3639, 3640, 3642 and 3643)
- Approved the 2005 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), a comprehensive listing of all Bay Area transportation projects set to receive federal funds or that are subject to a federally required action. Also approved the air quality conformity determination for the TIP. (MTC Resolutions 3629 and 3630)

Project Update Good News, Bad News for Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Travelers: New Funding Speeds Repairs, but Lane Closures to Continue

Crews have been laboring day and night to retrofit the 48-year-old Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, although much of the work is taking place underneath the deck and out of motorists' sight. Construction is expanding to include deck joint rehabilitation throughout the elevated steel portion of the structure, all while the bridge remains open to the traveling public. MTC, in its role as the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), agreed in July to advance \$49 million to Caltrans to accelerate the repair/replacement of the deck joints. The infusion of funds means the repairs may be finished two years early. Caltrans' seismic retrofit of the bridge — funded by a \$1 seismic surcharge on bridge tolls — began in 2001 and involves construc-



Crews are in the process of completely replacing the concrete trestle at the Marin County side of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

tion along the entire length of the 5.5-mile span. The project includes extensive underwater work to strengthen foundations; encasing support columns with concrete jackets; and installing new hardware such as isolation bearings

and dampers to improve the superstructure's strength and flexibility. In addition, Caltrans is completely replacing the concrete trestle section at the western edge of the span. The work has necessitated slower speeds on the bridge and regular

lane closures, albeit at night and on weekends to minimize the impact on the roughly 70,000 cars that cross the bridge daily (in both directions). Caltrans estimates that the retrofit project is now 85 percent done. The original timeline predicted completion of the seismic strengthening by mid-2005 and called for further joint and deck rehabilitation work — funded by the BATA Toll Bridge Rehabilitation Program and the Regional Measure 1 toll hike that voters approved in 1988 — to begin once the seismic retrofit was complete. But daily inspections during the retrofit work revealed potholes and cracks at the deck joints along the elevated portion of the bridge that required urgent repairs. Due to this deterioration, Caltrans and BATA decided

to incorporate the deck joint work into the retrofit so that both can be completed by mid-2005. Following completion of the retrofit and deck joint rehabilitation, Caltrans will advertise a separate contract to place a polyester-concrete overlay, which will provide a smooth, long-lasting riding surface on the bridge. Night and weekend lane and deck closures are intensifying as the work gains momentum. When one deck is closed, two-way traffic will be diverted to the open deck, eliminating the need to shut down eastbound or westbound traffic. — Karin Betts

Updated lane closure information can be found by calling the toll-free Bridge Hotline at 866.300.3530 or online at <www.richmondsanrafaelbridge.com>.

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Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, California 94607

510.464.7700 TEL.
510.464.7769 TDD/TTY
510.464.7848 FAX
info@mtc.ca.gov E-MAIL
www.mtc.ca.gov WEB

- Steve Heminger
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